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President Describes Canal
And discusses Its Future
Management And Defense

Following are the remarks and recommendations on the Panama Canal in President Taft's message to Congress:

At the instance of Colonel Goethals, the army engineer officer in charge of the work on the Panama Canal, I have just made a visit to the isthmus to inspect the work done and to consult with him on the ground as to certain problems which are likely to arise in the near future. The progress of the work is most satisfactory. If no unexpected obstacle presents itself, the canal will be completed well within the time fixed by Colonel Goethals, to wit, January 1, 1915, and with the estimate of cost, \$375,000,000.

Press reports have reached the United States from time to time giving accounts of slides of earth of very large yardage in the Culebra cut and elsewhere along the line, from which it might be inferred that the work has been much retarded and that the time of completion has been necessarily postponed.

The report of Doctor Hayes of the Geological Survey, whom I sent with in the last month to the isthmus to make an investigation, shows that this section of the canal zone is composed of sedimentary rocks of rather weak structure and subject to almost immediate disintegration when exposed to the air. Subsequent to the deposition of these sediments, igneous rocks, harder and more durable, have been thrust into them, and being cold at the time of their intrusion united but indifferently with the sedimentary rock at the contacts. The result of these conditions is that as the cut is deepened, causing unbalanced pressure, slides from the sides of the cut have occurred. These are in part due to the flowing of surface soil and decomposed sedimentary rocks upon inclined surfaces of the underlying undecomposed rock and in part by the crushing of structurally weak beds under excessive pressure. The slides occur on one side or the other of the cut through a distance of four or five miles, and now that their character is understood, allowance has been made in the calculations of yardage for the amount of slides which will have to be removed and the greater slope that will have to be given to the bank in many places in order to prevent their recurrence. Such allowance does not exceed ten millions of yards. Considering that the number of yards removed from this cut on an average of each month through the year is 1,300,000, and that the total remaining to be excavated, including slides, is about 30,000,000 yards it is seen that this addition to the excavation does not offer any great reason for delay.

While this feature of the material to be excavated in the cut will not seriously delay or obstruct the construction of a canal of the lock type, the increase of excavation due to such slides in the cut made eighty-five feet deeper for a sea level canal would certainly have been so great as to delay its completion to a time beyond the patience of the American people.

Among questions arising for present solution is the decision whether the canal shall be fortified. I have already stated to the Congress that I strongly favor fortification and I now reiterate this opinion and ask your consideration of the subject in the

light of the report already before you made by a competent board.

If, in our discretion, we believe modern fortifications to be necessary to the adequate protection and policing of the canal, then it is our duty to construct them. We have built the canal. It is our property. By convention we have indicated our desire for, and indeed undertaken, its universal and equal use. It is also well known that one of the chief objects in the construction of the canal has been to increase the military effectiveness of our navy.

Failure to fortify the canal would leave the attainment of both these aims in the position of rights and obligations which we should be powerless to enforce and which could never in any other way be absolutely safeguarded against a desperate and irresponsible enemy.

CANAL TOLLS.

Another question which arises for consideration and possible legislation is the question of tolls in the canal. This question is necessarily affected by the probable tonnage which will go through the canal. It is all a matter of estimate, but one of the government commissions in 1900 investigated the question and made a report. They concluded that the total tonnage of the vessels employed in commerce that could use the isthmian canal in 1914 would amount to 6,843,803 tons net register, and that this traffic would increase 25.1 per cent per decade; that it was not probable that all the commerce included in the totals would at once abandon the routes at present followed and make use of the new canal, and that it might take some time, perhaps two years, to readjust trade with reference to the new conditions which the canal would establish. He did not include, moreover, the tonnage of war vessels, although it is to be inferred that such vessels would make considerable use of the canal. In the matter of tolls he reached the conclusion that a dollar a net ton would not drive business away from the canal, but that a higher rate would do so.

In determining what the tolls should be we certainly ought not to insist that for a good many years to come they should amount to enough to pay the interest on the investment of \$400,000,000 which the United States has made in the construction of the canal. We ought not to do this, first, because the benefits to be derived by the United States for this expenditure is not to be measured solely by a return upon the investment. If it were then the construction might well have been left to private enterprise. It was because an adequate return upon the money invested could not be expected immediately, or in the near future, and because there were peculiar political advantages to be derived from the construction of the canal that it necessarily fell to the government to advance the money and perform the work.

In addition to the benefit to our naval strength, the canal greatly increases the trade facilities of the United States. It will undoubtedly cheapen the rates of transportation in all freight between the eastern and western seaboard, and it will greatly increase that trade by reason of the reduction in its cost. Then, if we are to have a world canal, and if we are anxious that the routes of the

world's trade shall be through the Panama Canal, we must recognize that we have an active competitor in the Suez Canal. Then, too, there are other means of crossing the isthmus—by the Tehuantepec Railroad and by other railroads and freight routes in Central America to the Atlantic side.

In all these cases the question whether the Panama Canal is to be used and its tonnage increased would be determined later by the charge for its use. My own impression is that the tolls ought not to exceed \$1 per net ton. On January 1, 1911, the tolls in the Suez Canal are to be seven francs and twenty-five centimes for one net ton by Suez canal measurement, which is a codification of Danube measurement. A dollar a ton will secure under the figures above a gross income from the Panama canal of nearly \$7,000,000. The cost of maintenance and operation is estimated to exceed \$3,000,000. Ultimately, of course, with the normal increase in trade, the income will approximate the interest charges upon the investment. On the whole I should recommend that within certain limits the President be authorized to fix the tolls of the canal and adjust them to what seems to be commercial necessity. The inquiries already made of the Chief Engineer of the canal show that the present consideration of this question is necessary in order that the commerce of the world may have time to adjust itself to the new conditions resulting from the opening of this new highway.

The next question that arises is that of the maintenance, management and general control of the canal after its completion. It should be premised that it is an essential part of our navy establishment to have the coal, oil and other ship supplies, a drydock, and repair shops, conveniently located with reference to naval vessel passing through the canal. Now, if the government, for naval purposes, is to undertake to furnish these conveniences to the navy, and they are conveniences equally required by commercial vessels, there would seem to be strong reasons why the government should take over and include in its management the furnishing, not only to the navy but to the public, drydock and repair shop facilities, and the sale of coal, oil, and other ship supplies.

The maintenance of a lock canal of this enormous size in a sparsely populated country and in the tropics, where the danger from disease is always present, requires a large and complete and well trained organization with full police powers, exercising the utmost care. The visitor to the canal who is impressed with the wonderful freedom from tropical diseases on the isthmus must not be misled as to the constant vigilance that is needed to preserve this condition. The machinery of the locks, the necessary amount of dredging, the preservation of the banks of the canal from slides, the operation and maintenance of the equipment of the railway—will all require a force, not, of course, to be likened in any way to the present organization for construction, but a skilled body of men who can keep in a state of usefulness this great instrument of commerce. Such an organization makes it easy to include within its functions the furnishing of drydock, fuel, repairs and supply facilities to the trade of the world. These will be more essential at the isthmus of Panama than they are at Port Said or Suez, because there are no depots for coal, supplies, and other commercial necessities within thousands of miles of the isthmus.

Another important reason why these ancillary duties may well be undertaken by the government is the opportunity for discrimination between patrons of the canal that is offered where private concessions are granted for the furnishing of these facilities. Nothing would create greater prejudice against the canal than the suspicion that certain lines of traffic were favored in the furnishing of supplies or that the supplies were controlled by any large interest that might have a motive for increasing the cost of the use of the canal. It may be added that the termini are not ample enough to permit the fullest competition in respect to the furnishing of these facilities and necessities to the world's trade even if it were wise to invite such competition and the granting of the concession would necessarily, under these circumstances, take on the appearance of privilege or monopoly.

I cannot close this reference to the canal without suggesting as a wise amendment to the interstate commerce law a provision prohibiting interstate commerce railroads from owning or controlling ships engaged in the trade through the Panama canal. I believe such a provision may be needed to save to the people of the United States the benefits of the competition in trade between the eastern and western seaboard which this canal will be constructed to secure.

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